

Chrono

16 JUN 1975

Honorable Elmer B. Staats
Comptroller General of the United States
General Accounting Office
441 G Street
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Staats:

My attention has been directed to a letter from Mr. Keller, General Accounting Office, to the Honorable William Proxmire dated May 10, 1974, which was placed in the Congressional Record by Senator Proxmire on February 11, 1975. The letter deals with the intelligence community and reviews the General Accounting Office's right to audit and obtain information from the Central Intelligence Agency.

Inasmuch as Mr. Keller has treated a subject basic to this Agency's capability to carry out work mandated by Congress, I believe it would serve a useful purpose to review some of the background concerning the use of confidential funds and their relationship to the audit of CIA over the years.

Mr. Keller notes in his letter that there are "a fairly substantial number of instances where expenditures are accounted for solely upon a certification by the head of the department or establishment involved." The need is clear in the case of this Agency. The necessity to safeguard certain truly vital foreign intelligence secrets has been recognized by the Congress in its direction to the Director of Central Intelligence to protect intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure. This responsibility was complemented by authorizing certain expenditures "for objects of a confidential, extraordinary, or emergency nature," to be accounted for solely on the certificate of the Director of Central Intelligence. Such expenditures would apply, for example, to a secret agent operating abroad in a hostile climate whose identity must be protected not only so that he can continue supplying the intelligence involved, but also because his freedom--and on occasion his life--weighs in the balance.

Other intelligence activities do not have such obvious security requirements, but are, nonetheless, within the sources and methods concept. Liaison with foreign intelligence and security agencies is extremely important in fields of both positive intelligence and counterintelligence. Such liaisons to be effective depend on the confidence of each service that the other will protect not only the mere fact of the relationships, but also its sources and methods and sensitive information. Compromise of any of these brings not only protests from the foreign liaison service, but in some cases a lessening or even cessation of its cooperation.

Even overt activities have their own security problems. Thus, many U. S. citizens and others are willing to provide sensitive information to overt intelligence units only on condition that their cooperation in this respect be absolutely protected.

This need for the special protection of intelligence sources and methods has been well recognized by officials in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of our Government. Mr. Lindsay C. Warren, then Comptroller General of the United States, in a letter dated March 12, 1948, to the Director, Bureau of the Budget, addressed the provision granting the Director of Central Intelligence the power to certify the expenditure of confidential funds by stating that while it provided "for the granting of much wider authority than I would ordinarily recommend for Government agencies, generally, the purposes sought to be obtained in the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency are believed to be of such paramount importance as to justify the extraordinary measures proposed therein." He went on to say that the "necessity for secrecy in such matters is apparent and the Congress apparently recognized this fully in that it provided in section 102(d)(3) of Public Law 253, that the Director of Central Intelligence shall be responsible for protecting intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure." Under these conditions, he stated, "I do not feel called upon to object to the proposals advanced ... "

3 It has been and it remains the policy of CIA to rely upon vouchered funds wherever possible. (Vouchered funds are those which can be accounted for and audited in conformance with the laws that apply to other Government agencies and with standard Government regulations and procedures.) Currently more [redacted] as vouchered funds.

The confidential funds certification authority referred to by Mr. Warren in his March 12, 1948 letter is reserved for "objects of a confidential, extraordinary, or emergency nature."

① ~~From the beginning of CIA records for all vouchered fund expenditures were made available to and were subject to a voucher audit by the GAO. Use of the voucher audit procedure allowed the GAO to examine expenditure and collection vouchers and related documents to determine whether expenditures were made legally and solely for the objects for which appropriations were made. Use of the voucher audit procedure also allowed CIA to protect those activities of a confidential, extraordinary, or emergency nature, i.e., intelligence sources and methods.~~

Subsequent to the enactment of the CIA legislation, GAO adopted a "comprehensive audit approach," and raised with the CIA Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee the desirability of an expanded audit of Agency activities. The Comptroller General stated by letter dated May 29, 1959 to Subcommittee Chairman Kilday that he did "not recommend any change in section 10 (now section 8) of the Central Intelligence Act" and that "any broadening of our audit activities should not include an evaluation of the intelligence activities of the Agency."

Mr. Allen Dulles, then Director of Central Intelligence, agreed that GAO should expand its current audit activities in a letter to the Comptroller dated October 16, 1959, cautioning, however, that the comprehensive audit would have to be limited so as to remain outside the area of sensitive security operations for which by law the Director's certificate must be deemed a sufficient voucher.

The results of the trial period of comprehensive audit from 1959 to 1961 were made known to the CIA Subcommittee in a letter of May 16, 1961 from the Comptroller General in which he said the GAO planned to discontinue the audit of CIA activities. He acknowledged that various steps were taken by the CIA "to place the General Accounting Office in a position to make a comprehensive audit of the overt activities of CIA." Nevertheless, he stated that GAO "cannot effectively review and evaluate activities of the Support Component because the confidential and overt activities of this component are integrated to such an extent that we cannot make reasonably comprehensive audits." He further stated "we have been given sufficient access to make reasonably comprehensive reviews of the overt activities of the Intelligence Component, but such reviews, in our opinion, will not be productive of significant evaluations because we cannot feasibly evaluate the extent to which needed overt information is available for collection or determine the need for the intelligence information selected for collation and use in the production of intelligence reports." In short, the Comptroller General was recognizing the conflict between the philosophy underlying a "comprehensive audit approach" and the Director's statutory responsibility and authority to protect intelligence sources and methods.

Both the Director and Chairman Vinson, of the House Committee on Armed Services, requested that the Comptroller General continue to audit Agency affairs on a limited basis, but after another trial period the Comptroller General reiterated his earlier view. In a letter to Chairman Vinson dated June 21, 1962, the Comptroller General stated his belief that for maximum effectiveness "it would be necessary for our GAO audit staff to have nearly complete access to CIA activities," and that even to perform reasonably comprehensive reviews would require "complete access to the administrative activities ... that are performed in support of both sensitive and nonsensitive operations of CIA."

Chairman Vinson replied to the Comptroller General on July 18, 1962, stating that, "the restrictions you met within the Central Intelligence Agency are necessary, I believe, for the proper protection of its intelligence activities and should be maintained." The Chairman agreed, however, that in view of the Comptroller General's opinion that a continued audit was not a worthwhile effort, GAO might withdraw from further audit activities in the Central Intelligence Agency.

In summary, I believe that several points are deserving of emphasis in assessing the nature and history of GAO's audit activities with respect to this Agency:

(a) CIA cooperated fully in all respects in extending administrative support and in granting security clearances and access to information related to vouchered fund activities.

(b) The Chairman of the interested oversight committee in the House of Representatives was fully informed of the nature and status of the activity.

(c) This Agency encouraged GAO to conduct and to continue to conduct its activities consistent with the operational and statutory requirements imposed upon this Agency.

(d) The decision to discontinue the audit activities was made solely by GAO and was approved by the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Sincerely,

SIGNED

W. E. Colby
Director

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